

A PERIOD OF ARMED TRUCE

over to their cause bishops in Soviet Armenia. If they succeeded, the G.P.U. would seek an appointment for such a bishop to a post outside the confines of the ILS.S.R. so as to have a willing agent in a foreign country. These appointments were possible because the *Catholicos*, the head of the Armenian Orthodox Church, had his See in Echmiadzin, in Soviet Armenia, and it was on his orders that bishops and priests were appointed to such far-flung countries as Manchuria or India. This was also the reason why Soviet authorities were always anxious to have some bishop from Soviet Armenia elected to the supreme rank of *Catholicos*. In 1929, since the *Catholicos* was of very advanced age, there was speculation about his successor. Among the candidates, Nerses, Armenian Archbishop of Tabriz, stood a good chance of being called to the post. Nerses was known to the Russians as favoring the Dashnak liberation movement. If he were elected, Iran might become his country of residence in his new capacity. This would practically put an end to Soviet influence on the Armenian Church. Under these circumstances the Soviet authorities did all they could in order to get rid of Nerses and his candidacy. The choice of the G.P.U. (which was in charge of this "operation") fell ultimately on an Armenian Church dignitary in France by the name of Kitchian. Kitchian had previously been drafted into the service of the G.P.U. Under some pretext he was invited to visit Russia and there an arrangement was concluded between him and the G.P.U.: Kitchian was to go to Soviet Armenia and, assisted by the Soviet secret police, was to obtain consecration as Archbishop and appointment as Legate to Iran. Once in this post he

was to work to
remove Nerses from Tabriz and replace him with
Archbishop Mesrop
of Isfahan (or rather Julfa, which is the Armenian
suburb of Isfahan)
who was simultaneously head of the Indo-Persian
Eparchy. Having
achieved the transfer of Mesrop to Tabriz, Kitchian
was then to try
to obtain for himself the appointment to the former's
place. By be-
coming Eparch for Iran and India he would be in a
position to estab-
lish a good network of G.P.U. agents all over India.
At the time
when Agabekov wrote his memoirs (1931) Kitchian
had obtained his
appointment to Teheran as a Legate. Agabekov
reported also that
about that time a G.P.U. man, a former bishop of
Harbin, Man-
churia, was appointed to the Armenian bishopric in
Bagdad and that